

CLAIMS

1. A method of billing a communications network user for goods or services associated with the transport of packet traffic from that communications network into a packet communications network, each packet having an address, wherein the method comprises; providing a set of rules, and determining from said rules and each packet address, a respective billing tariff and account for that packet.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein account details for network users and providers of goods and services are stored in a common accounts database.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein transfers of credit between accounts stored in the accounts database are determined from coupons generated for each transaction.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein network users have prepaid and postpaid accounts.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein each user account is accorded a respective credit limit.

6. A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein a user validation is performed prior to completion of a transaction.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the network is a wireless network.

8. A method of on-line shopping in which the cost of goods or services purchased by a customer are debited to that customer's pre-paid or postpaid account with a network operator, and a corresponding credit is applied to an account held by the provider of those goods or services.

9. A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein a transaction charge is retained by the operator.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein a supplier of goods or services is credited with a portion of the network operator's revenue for the transport of packet traffic relating to a transaction.

11. A method of providing combined billing of a communications packet network user for the delivery of communications services to that user and for the on-line purchase of goods and services by the user via the communications network, wherein the method comprises; providing a set of rules, and determining from said rules and each packet address, a respective billing tariff and account for that packet.

12. A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein network users have prepaid and postpaid accounts.

13. A method as claimed in claim 12, wherein each user account is accorded a respective credit limit.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein a supplier of goods or services is credited with a portion of the network operator's revenue for the transport of packet traffic relating to a transaction.

15. A method as claimed in claim 14, wherein said network comprises a wireless network.

16. Software in machine readable form on a storage medium and arranged to perform the method of claim 15.

17. Apparatus for billing a communications network user for goods or services associated with the transport of packet traffic from that communications network into a packet communications network, the apparatus comprising:

means for providing each packet with an address, a store having a set of rules, and

a packet analyzer for determining from said rules and each packet address, a respective billing tariff and account for that packet.

18. Apparatus as claimed in claim 17, wherein network users have prepaid and postpaid accounts.

19. Apparatus as claimed in claim 18, wherein each user account is accorded a
5 respective credit limit.

20. Apparatus as claimed in claim 19, wherein said network comprises a wireless network.